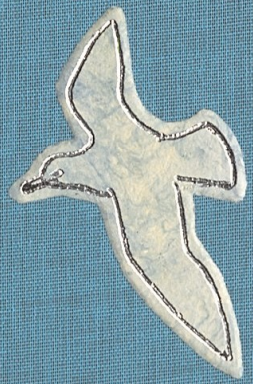


A Thonnau Gwyllt y Môr consists of an introductory essay & five full-page images – 3 aquatints & 2 mezzotints, of the coast & islands of Wales, each enclosed in folders blind-printed with etchings of sea birds, seals & dolphins. Poems, including one from Old English, are printed on Unryushi interleaving, in 24 pt. Perpetua italic, the main text being in 18 pt. roman. Written, illustrated, hand set & printed, by letterpress, by Shirley Jones, on 300 gram Somerset mouldmade paper.

The presentation boxes by John Sewell are covered in blue Dubletta cloth, lined with the Amate handmade paper used for the onlay & title.

In an edition of 30 copies, this is number Price: £800

A thonnau gwyllt y môr

And the wild waves of the sea

We will ride out alone, and then,
Under the stars of Wales,
Cry, Multitudes of arks!

Dylan Thomas

A hundred and twenty eight years ago, Wirt Sikes, the United States Consul in Cardiff, writing for an edition of Harpers New Monthly Magazine, extolled the pleasures and surprises of the Welsh coastline. He commented that nearly three quarters of the entire circuit of Wales is sea coast, and a great part of this rugged and dangerous. But he discovered also, a coastline that boasts bights and bays of unparalleled beauty, and long stretches of golden sands.

Much has changed since Wirt Sikes' time, but much has remained the same. It is still a coastline of contrasts. In winter the south west coast of Wales is exposed to the full force of Atlantic storms. Ferocious winds whip the sea in mid-ocean sending huge swells to break on cliffs and beaches. The storm-lashed cliffs are rendered even more dangerous by cruel rocks scattered at a distance from the mainland, scenes of shipwrecks in modern and ancient times. But there are long sweeping beaches, and sheltered havens, age-old villages still occupying their prehistoric sites, and picturesque castle ruins. And, as in Wirt Sikes' time, it is still the home of legends, myths—and saints.

Dunraven Castle once stood on the headland overlooking Dunraven Bay, on the south coast. It was the home of the Vaughan family, the wastrel head of which was Walter Vaughan, a notorious wrecker who lured ships to their doom at night with false lights on the shore. Vengeance overtook him when his only son became one of the victims of his shipwrecks as he was on his way home from his travels. The constant roar of waves on the cliffs might have given rise to another legend, that of the sightings of the Cyhyraeth, the Phantom Funeral foretelling a disaster at sea.

The Gower Peninsula, further west, must be the diamond in a necklace of gems threaded along the whole of Wales' coastline. It became the first place in Britain to be designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. At the southern end of the vast expanse of Rhossili's golden sands is the Gower's most dramatic feature: Worm's Head, a promontory that runs nearly a mile out to sea. At high tide it becomes an island, the area connecting it to the mainland being then submerged. It looks uncannily like a great dragon winding its way out to sea and rearing its head as it makes its final plunge into the waves. Over a thousand years ago, mariners named it the *Wyrm*, the Old English word for dragon. It can even roar at times, when strong winds drive the breakers into the blowhole.

Gower has many smuggling stories. It is likely that Culver Hole, just beyond Port Eynon, was specially adapted for smuggling purposes, since a deep cleft in the rock running up from the sea to the cliff top has been sealed by a rough wall

pierced by a series of windows. It may have been a stronghold of the wild Lucas family, who controlled West Gower in Tudor times, and in later years became a smugglers' retreat.

St. Govan's Head, directly south of Pembroke, is rich in legend. The name in folklore is associated with Sir Gawain, nephew of King Arthur, and in a deep hollow below the Head, tall cliffs tower over St. Govan's tiny chapel, a part of which may, in fact, date from the fifth century. Inside the chapel is a vertical cleft in the rock where Gawain is said to have hidden from his enemies. In time Sir Gawain became St. Govan in the way Christian practice adopted and assimilated pagan legends. In the arch above the chapel a bell hung for centuries; it seems it sounded without human aid for a death or disaster at sea.

West of St. Govan's Head is Bosherston Mere, a round hole which leads by a narrow rock-hewn tunnel down through the cliff to the sea. A hollow booming resounds from the hole, becoming prodigious during a storm, when columns of water rush up through the tunnel high into the air with a deafening reverberation. Apparitions and mysterious wailings haunted Bosherston Mere, but ...

There is nothing to hope and nothing to fear
When the wind sounds low on Bosherston Mere
There is much to fear and little to hope
When unseen hands pull St. Govan's rope;
And the magic stones as the wise know well
Promise sorrow and death, like St. Govan's bell.

Off the coast of Wales, the islands cast their own spells. Caldey, just off the coast of fashionable Tenby, is notable for its community of Cistercian monks and the Italianate style of its Abbey, but it is Grassholm, Skokholm and Skomer, off shore from the Marloes peninsula in the south-west of Pembrokeshire, that are of greatest natural interest. All are noted for their bird life. The little far-out island of Grassholm, the 'Gwales in Penfro', of Mabinogion fame is now a bird sanctuary and home to more than 39,000 breeding pairs of Gannets. Ronald Lockley, the great ornithologist, established Skokholm, sixty years ago, as an internationally famous site for bird life. But in a class by itself is Skomer.

'See my child, how remarkable is the island of Skomer! Come with me, and I will show you every cranny of its outer shore', wrote Hilaire Belloc, in *The Cruise of the Nona*. Eighty years later, Iolo Williams, television wildlife presenter and writer added, 'If I were to choose one Welsh nature reserve that could hold its own against any other reserve, anywhere in the world, it would be Skomer. It is

the diamond in the crown jewels of Welsh wildlife.'

Grey Seals haul out on its rocks, and the surrounding waters are home to porpoises and dolphins. In late May, Bluebells blanket the island in psychedelic purple, while sweet-scented Sea Campion bloom on the coastal banks, and Red Campion provides even more colour in June. And woven into this rich natural tapestry is man's presence on the island. Settlement remains date back to the Iron Age, giving the island its status as one of the best preserved Scheduled Ancient Monuments. But it is for its colonies of sea birds that Skomer is truly famous. Its coast is the habitat of thousands of Puffins, Razorbills, Guillemots, Curlews, Cormorants and Kittiwakes. The Short-eared Owl hunts the unique Skomer Vole, and the Great Black-backed Gulls prey on everything. The latter are the sinister reason the island's magnificent population of Manx Shearwaters, a third of the world's population, delay until it is dark, returning to their nests after their daytime fishing out at sea. The sound of their call as the flocks fly in is hauntingly memorable. Sailors thought they were the cries of lost souls at sea.

Higher up the coast are the calmer waters of St. Bride's Bay and that most Celtic of regions, scene of the life-labours of St. David, patron saint of Wales. Born around 462, he came to be revered as a great Christian leader. St. David's Cathedral was built on the site of the monastery he founded in 530 at Glyn Rhosyn– Vale of Roses. It became one of the great historic shrines of Christendom, to which kings and conquerors made pilgrimages. After St. David's canonisation, two visits to his tomb were considered equal to one to Rome, and three equalled a visit to the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem.

St. David's is the oldest cathedral settlement in the British Isles but the area is rich in pre-historic remains too. Pentre Ifan is a dramatic monolith, the denuded stones of a burial chamber, set in its lovely valley looking down to the sea. This burial chamber is as old as the Pyramids, and was created long before the coming of the Celts. It was built by the first people to live a settled life in Wales – farmers who grew barley, and kept cattle, sheep, pigs and goats.

Off St. David's Head is Ramsey, an impressive whaleback of an island surrounded by really dangerous waters, being separated from the mainland by a narrow sound, half dammed by a sinister line of jagged rocks with the ominous title of the Bitches. And beyond the island is a mass of wild rocks called the Bishop and Clerks, presumably from their proximity to the Cathedral, though the Tudor historian, George Owen, warned they preached a deadly doctrine in winter.

Below the waters of Cardigan Bay is the legendary drowned land of Cantre'r

Gwaelod. The area north from Ramsey Island to Bardsey Island was once a great plain, a tract of fertile land said to be forty miles long and twenty wide, highly populated, cultivated, and defended from the sea by a strong embankment and sluices. According to the folk tale, Seithenyn, the Keeper of the Embankment, in a drunken stupor one night, left the sluices open, the sea came in, the land was inundated and the inhabitants drowned. This was meant to have been about 520. It is interesting that in the Second Branch of *The Mabinogion*, when the army of Bendigeidfran sailed from the Island of the Mighty, the giant king waded across to Ireland since, 'the sea was not wide then. There were only two rivers, the Lli and the Archan. Later the sea spread out when it flooded the kingdom'. It is a geological fact that some 40,000 years ago, only a wide river separated Wales from Ireland and that nowadays three fingers of land are exposed in the Bay during very low spring tides. They are known as the Sarnau, the largest being Sarn Badrig, St. Patrick's Causeway.

The beautiful *Llŷn* peninsula, stretching twenty five miles into the Irish Sea, divides Cardigan Bay to the south from Caernarfon Bay to the north. At its western tip is Bardsey Island, associated with pilgrims for centuries. The site of a sixth century monastery, it was known in the early Middle Ages as 'the gate of Paradise'. Always regarded as sacred, it is reputed to be the burial place of 20,000 saints, as well as Merlin of Arthurian legend.

At the most northerly point of Wales lies Anglesey, the largest of its islands. It was here that the Romans, fearful of their power as priests, poets and prophets of the British, finally crushed the Druids some two thousand years ago. Over a thousand years later, Geraldus Cambrensis dismissed Anglesey as 'an arid, stony land, rough and unattractive in appearance', while commenting just a few lines later, 'this island, from the richness of its soil and its abundant produce, has been able to supply all Wales.' Indeed, Anglesey was known at that time as *Mam Cymru*, Mother of Wales. And today, much of its coastline is designated An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Anglesey is separated from the mainland by the Menai Strait, at the southern entrance of which is Llanddwyn Island. Hardly more than a narrow finger of land only really an island at high tides, it is a magical place. Its name means the church of St. Dwynwen, who lived there in the fifth century. Because of her own unhappy love life, she prayed that all true lovers find happiness, and she became the patron saint of lovers. Her feast day, the twenty fifth of January, is often celebrated with cards and flowers. She is the Welsh equivalent of St. Valentine.

On The Coast Road

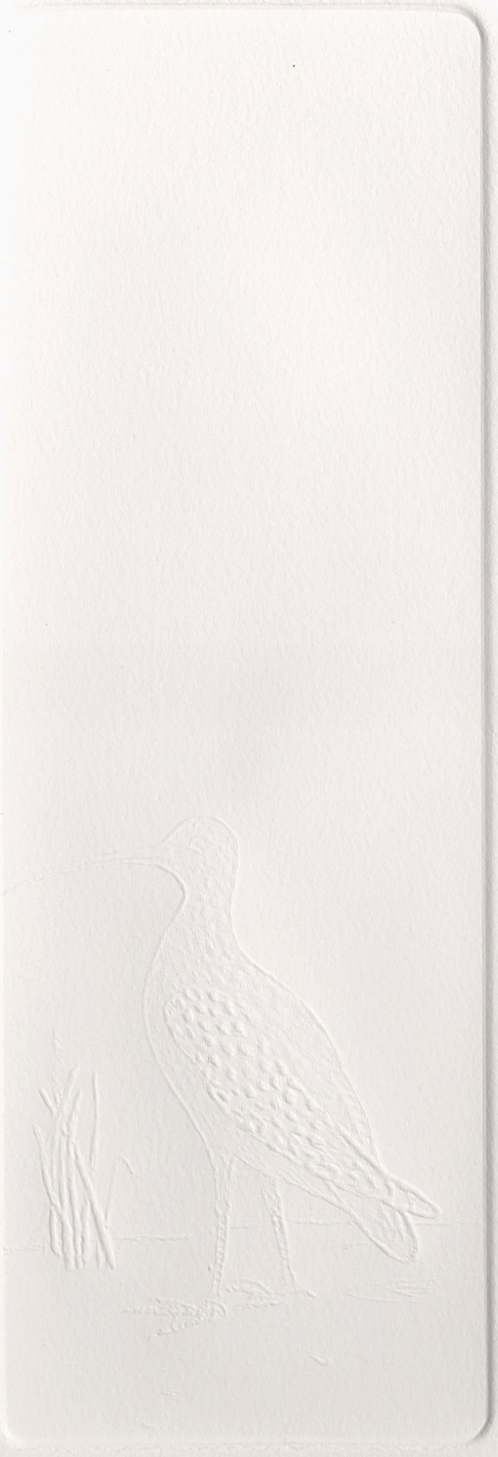
This ash-end of the year, too short of light,
the grumpy afternoon closes down
and a bossy wind summons, like a conductor,
choirs of ghosts to the telegraph wires.

Soon the roofs of Ogmore recede out of sight
as I walk on awake in the wrong weather.
Ahead, a seagull squeals, bullied off course,
and sheep scrum behind stone-armoured walls.

Down there, on that rock's pulpit, my father fished
till his own days grew shorter. Now, briefly,
this road leads to the Past. Is it the scolding wind
that makes my teeth ache and my eyes water?

At the old, shut farmhouse, I meet a boozy gang
in fancy dress. The man in a white sheet
holds up, on a pole, the skull of a horse.
The Mari Lwyd! I blink. They vanish of course
and the graffito I, as a boy, once chalked
on the ruined barn beyond this farmhouse
has vanished too: STRAIGHT ON FOR THE FUTURE.

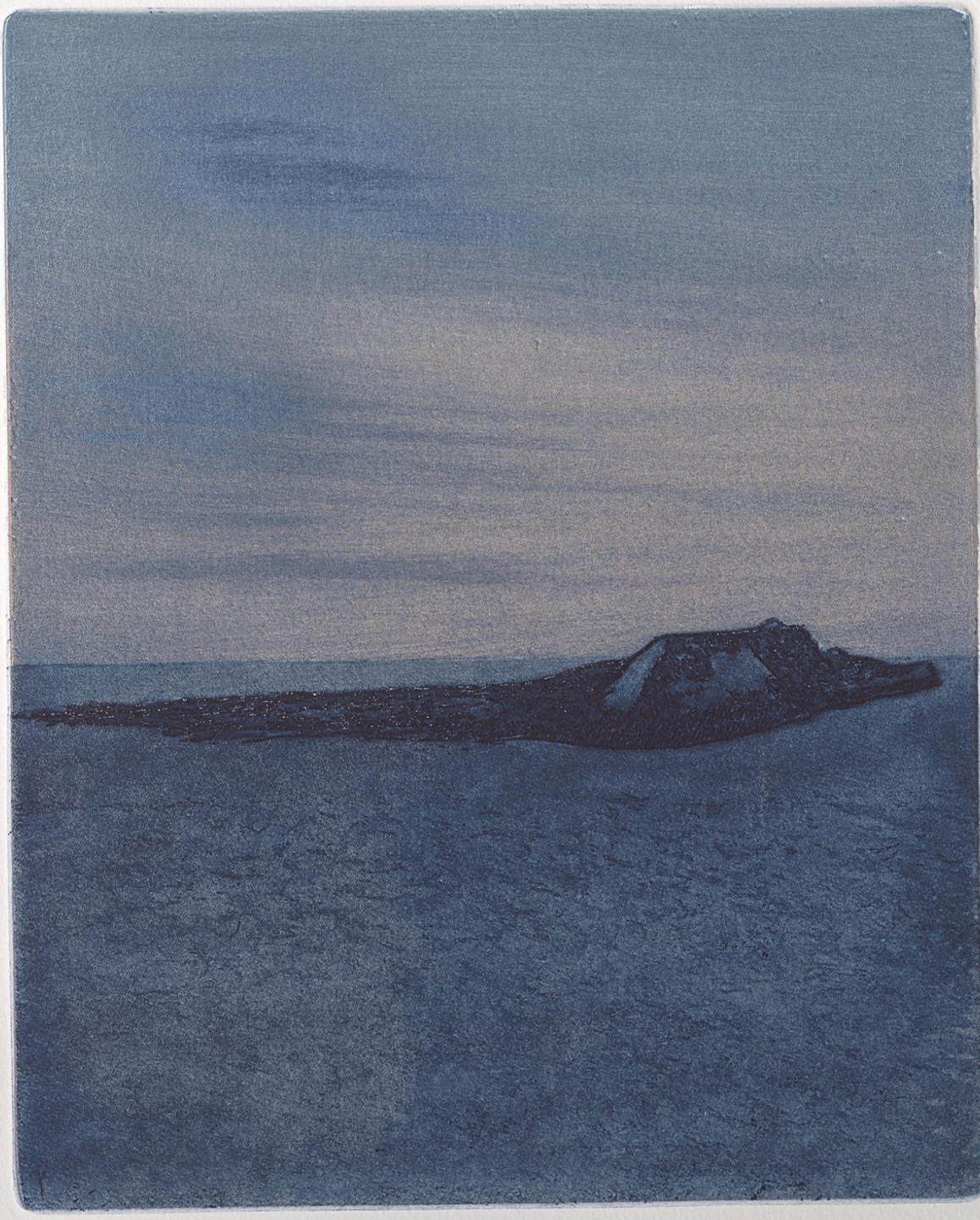
Dannie Abse

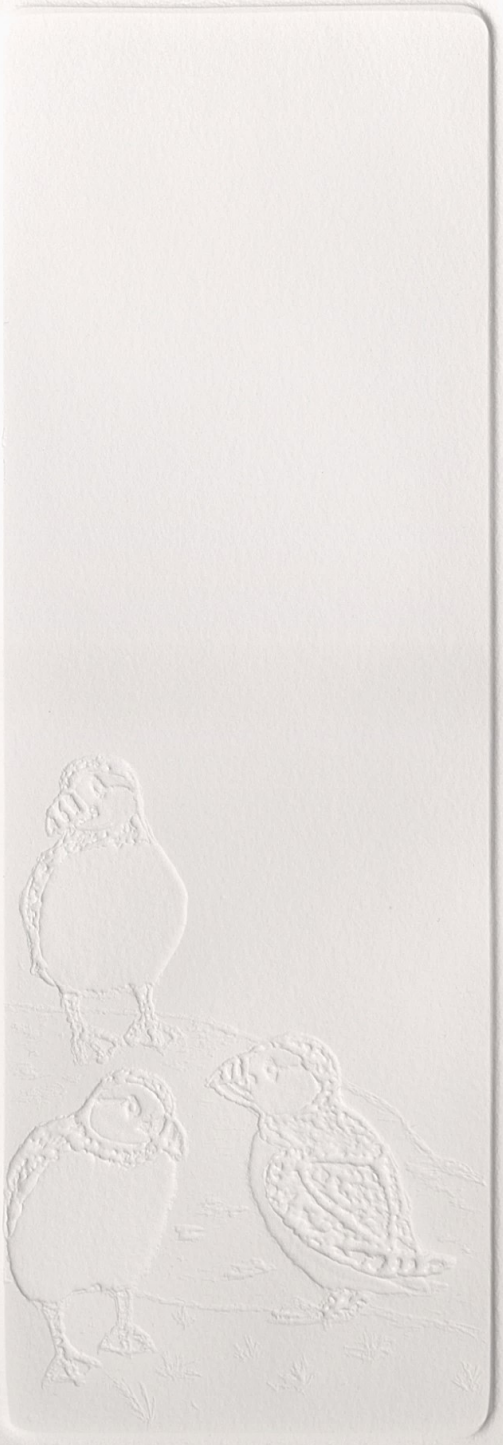


Þæt se mon ne wāt,
þe him on foldan fægrost limpeð,
hū ic earmcearig iscealdne sǣ
winter wunade wræccan lāstum
winemǣgum bidroren
bihongen hrīmgicelum: hægl scūrum flēag.
Þǣr ic ne gehȳrde būtan hlimman sǣ,
iscaldne wǣg, hwīlum ylfete song:
dyde ic mē tō gomene ganetes hlēoþor
and huilpan swēg fore hleahtor wera,
mǣw singende fore medodrince.
Stormas þǣr stānclifu bēotan, þǣr him
stear[n] oncwæð
isigfeþera; ful oft þæt earn bigeal
ūrigfeþra.

That man does not know,
Who dwells at ease on land
How I, careworn on the ice-cold sea,
Passed winter as an exile
Cut off from kinsmen
Hung round with icicles: hail flying in showers.
I heard nothing there except the sea resounding,
The ice-cold wave, at times the song of the swan:
I took my delight in the cry of the gannet
And the sound of the curlew, not the laughter of men
In the seagull singing, not the drinking of mead.
There storms beat against the cliffs
And there the tern with icy feathers answered him;
Full often the dewy-winged eagle screamed.

THE SEAFARER





At the end of the seventh year they set out for Gwales in Penfro, and there, overlooking the sea, was a fine, royal dwelling for them, with a great hall. They went into the hall and saw two open doors, and a third one closed, that faced Cornwall. 'See,' said Manawydyn, 'yonder is the door we may not open.' That night they lacked for nothing and were joyful. And notwithstanding all the sorrows they had seen and suffered, they had no memory of them, nor of any sorrow in the world. And there they passed four score years, not aware they had ever spent a time more joyful or pleasant. It was no less pleasant than when they came there, nor could one tell, by looking at each other, that time had passed.

Then one day Heilyn son of Gwyn said, 'Shame on my beard if I do not open the door to find out if what they say about it is true.' He opened the door and looked on Cornwall and Aber Henfelen. And when he looked, they were as conscious of every loss they had ever suffered and every kinsman and companion they had missed and every misery that had befallen them as if it had happened right then.

The Second Branch: MABINOGION

I am David.
In the Vale of Roses
I have built my house
In a solitude of stones
Crowded with daffodils
In a cleft of sea-green hills.

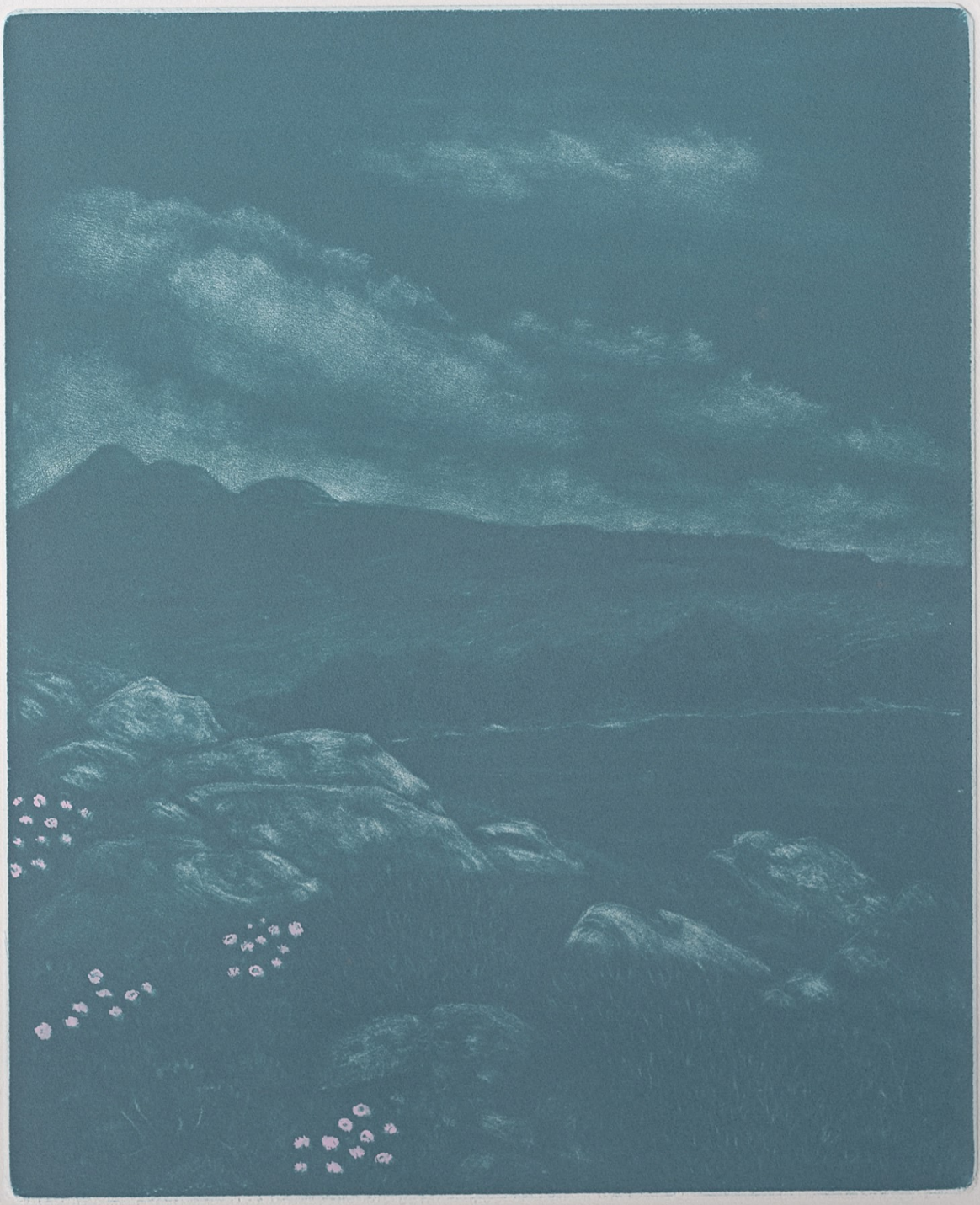
I am David.
The winds of winter
Spoke to me here,
The music of water,
The canticle of spring
Which all the wild birds sing.

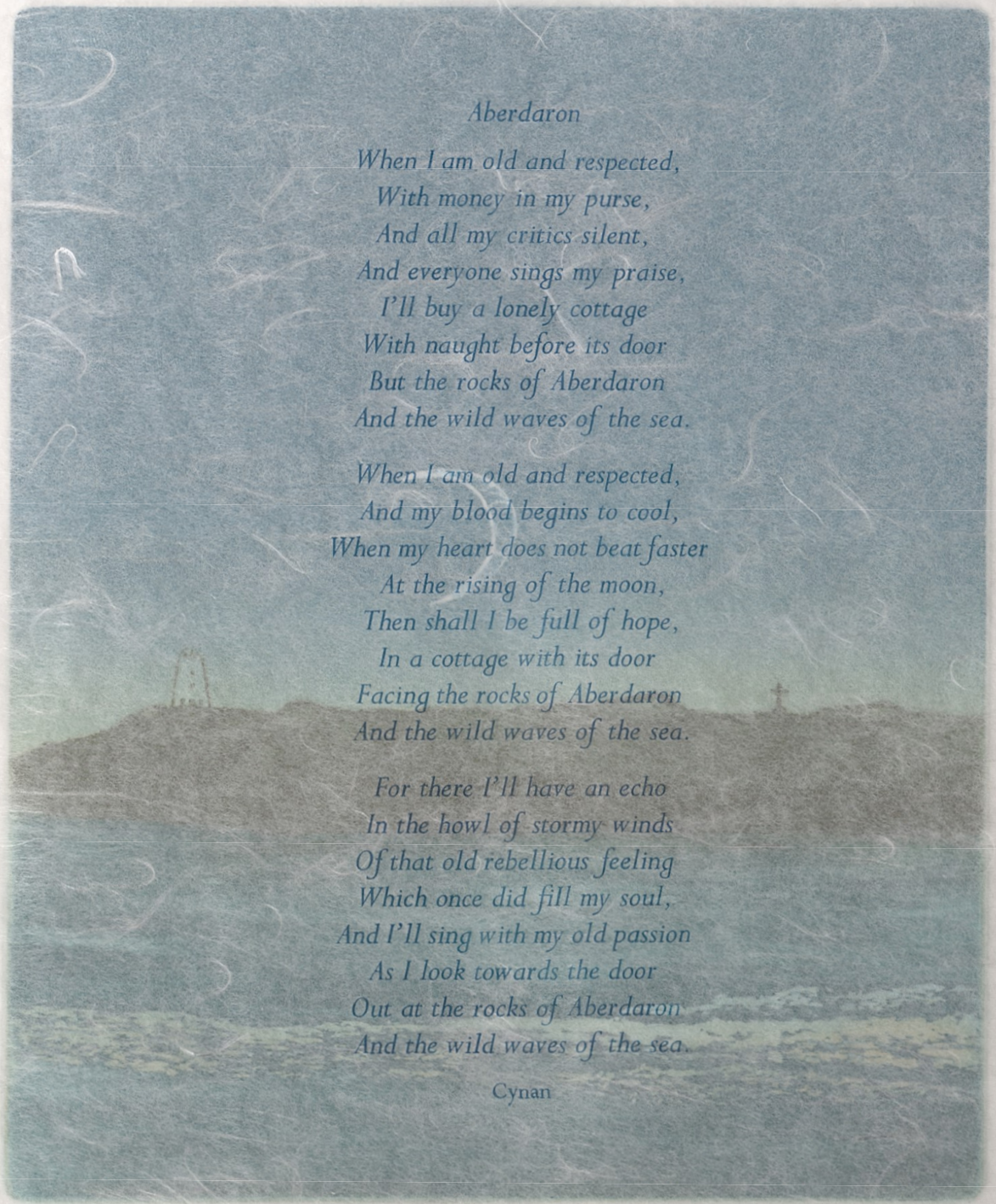
I am David.
I am the Waterman.
By the banks of the river
In a vale of sweet springs
Hidden from the sea's salt swell,
Here I have dug my well.

I am David.
I am the Dovebearer.
I speak of peace.
I counsel joy.
In a fold of the furthest west,
Here is my stone-ribbed nest.

I am David.
Under my feet
The rock of Dyfed
Has raised me up
To tower in time's March gales.
I am David. I am Wales.

Raymond Garlick





Aberdaron

When I am old and respected,
With money in my purse,
And all my critics silent,
And everyone sings my praise,
I'll buy a lonely cottage
With naught before its door
But the rocks of Aberdaron
And the wild waves of the sea.

When I am old and respected,
And my blood begins to cool,
When my heart does not beat faster
At the rising of the moon,
Then shall I be full of hope,
In a cottage with its door
Facing the rocks of Aberdaron
And the wild waves of the sea.

For there I'll have an echo
In the howl of stormy winds
Of that old rebellious feeling
Which once did fill my soul,
And I'll sing with my old passion
As I look towards the door
Out at the rocks of Aberdaron
And the wild waves of the sea.

Cynan

Sea Sick Pilgrims

Based on a tiny misericord woodcarving in St. David's Cathedral

Footnotes

The suggestion of a horse's head in the mezzotint of Dunraven Bay recalls Dannie Abse's memory of the Mari Lwyd in, 'The Coast Road'. The Mari Lwyd, literally 'Holy Mary', was a form of winter wassailing once common across the south of Wales. It involved a horse's skull, the Mari possibly from the English 'mare' rather than the Virgin Mary, and 'llwyd' can also mean pale or grey. The Mari, on a pole, its bearer shrouded in white, and accompanied by revellers, was led from door to door, demanding entry, and girls were often chased for a kiss. So the Virgin Mary appears not to have played a big part in all this.

It seemed fitting to introduce my aquatint of Worm's Head with a passage from the Old English poem, 'Seafarer'. But the 'thorn' and 'ash' not being available in Perpetua, the passage was set in Baskerville roman at Gwasg Gregynog, and adjusted technically to conform with the more delicate 'body' of the 24 point Perpetua italic I used to set my translation.

The little island of Grassholm, the 'Gwales in Penfro' of the Mabinogion, *is where the seven survivors of the fateful battle in Ireland spent eighty years. Bendigeidfran, their king, had won in Ireland, 'a victory that was no victory', since he and almost all his army had lost their lives. Grassholm, now famous as a gannetry, at times appears white with nesting birds, and the seven gannets in flight above it recall the seven survivors of the battle.*

St. David's Head juts out into a wild tidal race, named 'promontory of the eight perils', by Ptolemy. So when I fell on the narrow path back from there, I was thankful to get away with just a bruising. A drop to horrific rocks was at my side, and the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path provides no namby-pamby safety barriers.

Our friend, Brynach Parri, provided me with his translation of Cynan's poom, Aberdaron, its refrain becoming the title of my book. So Aberdaron, on the Llŷn Peninsula, was my first choice for the image, until we went to Ynys Llanddwyn, in Anglesey. It was the fifth century retreat of Saint Dwynwen, whose story was how I ended my introduction. A blue kite floating above the island, midway between its lighthouse and a cross, was too magical to lose.

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The Welsh Academy: *Encyclopaedia of Wales*
Ronald Lockley: *Shearwater*

Colophon

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Shirley Jones 2011